



**URBAN  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
INITIATIVE**

*Business innovators serving urban communities. [urbanei.org](http://urbanei.org)*

## **Urban Entrepreneurship Initiative moves from advocacy to action; announces new member-driven model and innovator platform to activate next generation of urban innovation**

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Detroit –June 3, 2024 – The nonprofit [Urban Entrepreneurship Initiative \(UEI\)](http://urbanei.org), established in 2014 to advocate for entrepreneurial activity aimed at improving the quality of life in urban communities, is re-launching with a proprietary urban innovator platform and member-driven model to inspire and activate a new generation of urban innovators. The announcement was made by W. David Tarver, UEI founder and president, tech entrepreneur, investor and longtime lecturer at the University of Michigan College of Engineering’s Center for Entrepreneurship. Seed funding for the re-launch was provided by a \$250,000 grant from the University of Michigan.

“Many people now recognize the role entrepreneurship plays in ensuring urban community vitality, but there remains a shortage of urban innovators capable of creating game-changing, scalable businesses that specifically target and address urban community needs. That’s why UEI is moving from advocacy to action, with the online urban innovator platform serving as a home base where urban innovators can find vital business model information, inspiration, and a connection to like-minded individuals and groups,” Tarver said.

Initially, UEI advocated for urban-focused entrepreneurship mainly via its annual Urban Entrepreneurship Symposiums held in Flint, Detroit and Ann Arbor, Michigan. The UEI Symposiums convened regional and national entrepreneurs and thought leaders in business, academia, community organizations and government to raise awareness about the need for urban entrepreneurship, to discuss best practices and solutions, and to recognize accomplishments. The organization also provided direct advice to entrepreneurs, facilitated development of the university-level course in urban entrepreneurship, and hosted an eight-week “Urban Launchpad” bootcamp at SpaceLab Detroit in 2018. When the Covid-19 pandemic caused tremendous disruption in urban communities, Tarver decided that UEI needed to take on a more active role to spur urban innovation.

UEI’s new strategy will focus on:

- Creating a member-driven business model centered on access to its urban innovator platform, an online compendium of urban-focused business profiles that will help innovators shape new businesses and projects by understanding the triumphs and challenges of existing urban innovation efforts from across the globe.
- Providing community profiles and needs assessments that will direct entrepreneurial energy to the places where it is needed most.

- Convening entrepreneurial-minded professionals from varied backgrounds - from startups, existing businesses, community organizations, academia, and government - through a global, online urban entrepreneurship network.
- Producing a knowledge base of courses, seminars, media, and reference materials that emphasize the unique knowledge, methods, and skills necessary for effective urban innovation and entrepreneurship.

The three primary beneficiaries of UEI activities are the member entrepreneurs, who maximize their impact and financial success while boosting career satisfaction; the companies they work with who achieve financial success and positive community impact; and the urban communities that become more livable, productive, equitable and resilient.

“Urban quality of life is subject to disruption by rapidly advancing technology, cultural conflict, and environmental crises,” Tarver said. “Urban innovation – distinctly different from general business entrepreneurship - is the key to minimizing disruption and providing new wealth and opportunity for residents.”

A Flint, Michigan, native, [Tarver](#) holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in electrical engineering from the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor. In 1983, at age 30 and after working on breakthrough technologies at AT&T Bell Laboratories in New Jersey, he launched Telecom Analysis Systems, Inc. What began as a basement enterprise engaged in the design, manufacture, and sale of advanced test equipment products for the telecommunications industry grew to a business with over \$10 million in sales in 1995. Tarver sold the business that same year to London-based Bowthorpe plc., (Spirent) and remained with the company for four years, identifying and negotiating key acquisitions that increased group sales from approximately \$10 million to over \$250 million and nearly tripled the parent company’s stock market value.

Tarver left Spirent in 1999 and started the nonprofit Red Bank (New Jersey) Education and Development Initiative to tackle the problem of low academic performance by local students. He led the organization from 2000 to 2007 before transitioning its operations and assets to other local organizations. In the Initiative’s first four years, the percentage of Red Bank Public School students who passed the mandated New Jersey state performance assessment increased from 22% to over 60%. Tarver ultimately returned to Southeast Michigan in 2007, publishing [Proving Ground: A Memoir](#) in 2012 and establishing the Urban Entrepreneurship Initiative in 2014, which was recognized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation in 2015.

Tarver has served as a lecturer in U-M’s College of Engineering Center for Entrepreneurship since 2012, teaching students from a broad range of disciplines. In 2015, he created the Urban Entrepreneurship Practicum course, which introduces students to developing or enhancing businesses that aim to improve the quality of life in urban communities. In 2016, Tarver received the University of Michigan College of Engineering Distinguished Service Award.

Those interested in joining UEI or supporting its work can contact [info@urbanei.org](mailto:info@urbanei.org).

### **About the Urban Entrepreneurship Initiative (UEI)**

Detroit-based but globally minded, the nonprofit Urban Entrepreneurship Initiative provides a proprietary Urban Innovator Platform for entrepreneurial professionals and the organizations that support them. Using a membership-based model, UEI is committed to providing human connections and access to education, technology tools, business resources and funding sources

that further the efforts of urban entrepreneurs committed to creating sustainable, scalable business solutions that increase the vitality of urban communities. Learn more at [urbanei.org](http://urbanei.org).

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